

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 465 229

EA 031 711

AUTHOR Kesner, Rebecca J., Ed.
TITLE The Doubly Exceptional Child: A Principal's Dilemma.
INSTITUTION National Association of Elementary School Principals, Alexandria, VA.
ISSN ISSN-0735-0023
PUB DATE 2002-00-00
NOTE 5p.; Theme issue. Published quarterly.
AVAILABLE FROM National Association of Elementary School Principals, 1615 Duke St., Alexandria, VA 22314-3483 (\$2.50 prepaid; quantity discounts). Tel: 800-386-2377 (Toll Free); Fax: 800-396-2377 (Toll Free); Web site: <http://www.naesp.org>.
PUB TYPE Collected Works - Serials (022) -- Guides - Non-Classroom (055)
JOURNAL CIT Streamlined Seminar; v20 n4 Summer 2002
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Disabilities; Disability Identification; Elementary Secondary Education; *Gifted Disabled; *Intervention; Special Education; *Talent Development; Talent Identification

ABSTRACT

This document contains two articles concerned with doubly exceptional children and gifted education. In "The Doubly Exceptional Child: A Principal's Dilemma," (Carol J. Mills and Linda E. Brody), such children do not fit into the usual categories for sorting children because their gifts and disabilities often mask each other. Suggestions are presented for promoting a school climate that takes these children into account, assessing them, and creating intervention strategies. "Gifted Education: A Talent Development Approach" (Jonathan A. Plucker) acknowledges gifted education programs as being among the most controversial aspects of American education. It suggests that a "talent development" approach be used as a means of avoiding the difficulty in identifying and instructing talented students, whereby techniques from gifted education are applied to all students. Suggested strategies include establishing a climate for talent development, not ignoring the needs of highly gifted students, seriously addressing creativity, providing varied means of instruction and assessment, and giving teachers flexibility. Recommended books are "School Leader's Guide to Special Education," by NAESP and Education Research Service, and "Removing the Mask: Giftedness in Poverty," by Paul D. Slocumb and Ruby K. Payne. (RT)

Streamlined SEMINAR

VOLUME 20, NUMBER 4
SUMMER 2002

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION
OF ELEMENTARY
SCHOOL PRINCIPALS

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The Doubly Exceptional Child: A Principal's Dilemma

Carol J. Mills and Linda E. Brody

Most schools' mission statements convey a commitment to meet the needs of all students. In reality, however, this can be a difficult commitment. At our Diagnostic and Counseling Center we see dozens of very bright children who are on a downward spiral of falling grades, diminishing motivation, and increasing behavioral or emotional problems.

Parents tell us of seeing the early promise of a bright academic future for their child begin to change around fourth grade, and to dramatically shift in a negative direction in middle school. By the time it is evident that something is wrong and intervention is needed, we find ourselves dealing with angry and frustrated parents, confused educators, and a child who is either truculent and defiant, or emotionally and intellectually "turned off." What is happening?

In many, if not most, cases, we are dealing with a child who is "doubly exceptional": one who has exceptional

intellectual or academic strengths, but who also has one or more learning disabilities. The co-existence of giftedness with learning disabilities makes these students distinct from those who fall into one category or the other. And the complex nature of the way their strengths and weaknesses interact make assessment and remediation difficult. What can you do with a student who can solve complex math problems in her head but can't master multiplication? Or a verbally gifted student with ADHD who can't write an organized, coherent paper?

It is important to understand that doubly exceptional students are not underachievers because of a poor home or school environment, emotional problems, or lack of motivation. Although conceptually difficult to understand, there is something basically different about these students' processing of information that makes it difficult for them to learn certain things or to demonstrate learning, even as they show advanced abilities in other areas.

Because these children don't fit into the usual categories for sorting children with special needs, such as the learning disabled or slow learners, they are often misidentified and underserved. Their cognitive/academic profile is so complex, with so many pieces

of contradictory behavior to sort out, that their gifts and disabilities often mask each other. Yet, with proper identification, minimal accommodations, and some adjustments in their school programs, many doubly exceptional students flourish.

Gifted Students with Learning Disabilities

Most doubly exceptional children—defined here as gifted students with learning disabilities—fall into three categories. The first group includes those who have been previously identified as gifted but are considered underachievers when they begin to have difficulties in school. Their learning disabilities are never diagnosed and over time they may no longer be seen as gifted.

A second group includes students whose disability is severe enough that it has been diagnosed, but their exceptional abilities are never addressed. They are often placed in a special education setting where they are ill-served and under-challenged. Although some gifted students with learning disabilities may benefit from time spent with a learning specialist, a special education resource room usually lacks the intellectual stimulation they need.

The third and largest group are those students whose gifts and disabilities mask each other. These students

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often perform at grade level and, therefore, are never recognized as having special needs in either area. In all three groups, too, often only those students with knowledgeable and persistent parents get the assessments needed to plan appropriate educational programs.

The Principal's Role

Because most schools have students who are both gifted and have learning disabilities, it is important for principals to ensure that these doubly exceptional students are properly identified and served. Here are some ways you can help:

School Climate. As teachers struggle with larger and more diverse classes, the individual needs of students can get lost in the process. As the principal, you can encourage teachers to establish and monitor individual goals for students. And you can promote

flexible grouping, independent study, and other mechanisms to help students achieve their individual goals. With an increased emphasis on the characteristics and needs of individual students, the disparate strengths and weaknesses of doubly exceptional students are more likely to be observed, identified, and addressed.

Staff Development. As you become more aware of doubly exceptional students in your school, you need to educate your staff about how to identify these students and meet their needs.

Assessment. While many of the students we see are brought in by parents, schools should take the initiative by assessing all students who are achieving below their potential, as well as those who seem to have special intellectual abilities. As principal, you can encourage screening of all of your students and then obtain a more comprehensive and in-depth assessment for

those students who appear to have special needs. The complex cognitive profiles of doubly exceptional students require professional assessment by a school psychologist or an outside diagnostician in order to identify the underlying cognitive deficits that are at the heart of the child's learning disability.

Flexibility. Move away from rigid definitions and eligibility scores for the school's gifted program or special services. Some students may need both. Rather than thinking in terms of a "one-size-fits-all" approach, think about a range of services that are available to meet the needs of each student.

Intervention strategies. An appropriate program for the doubly exceptional child requires high-level instruction in his or her area(s) of strength, remediation in area(s) of weakness, grade-level instruction in some areas, and accommodations to enhance success in all of these areas. At times, only minimal accommodations, such as untimed tests or oral exams, may be needed. Others, such as gifted dyslexic students, may need targeted remediation even though they may need to be grouped with other intellectually gifted students in order to be fully challenged. Doubly exceptional students may also need counseling to address their social and emotional problems.

One Principal's Initiative: A Case Study

James is a doubly exceptional student. At a young age, he was seen as profoundly gifted: he had learned to read and picked up knowledge easily. In kindergarten and first grade, his teachers observed that he was fidgety and had poor peer relations, but his parents believed he just needed to be challenged more. By second grade, however, his teachers expressed real concerns about him. He still didn't know how to make friends and he was getting into fights on the playground. Although he was reading Harry Potter books, James performed poorly on standardized tests and never completed his work.

The principal met with James' parents, who reluctantly agreed to a full psycho-educational assessment that included IQ, achievement, and personality/behavioral tests. The principal then held a meeting that included James' classroom teacher, the school psychologist who had administered the tests, the gifted resource teacher, the special education resource teacher, and the school social worker. All had been asked to spend some time with James before the meeting.

The assessment results showed James to be a highly gifted student who already was reading on a middle-school level. He was also diagnosed with ADHD and symptoms suggestive of Asperger's Syndrome, a mild form of autism. James was also found to have difficulties in the area of fine and gross motor development.

It was suggested that James move up to a third-grade group of advanced readers and, because of his advanced math skills, he could benefit from an individualized math program. Not only did these steps have a positive academic impact on James, but his peer relations improved with the older students. Consequently, he moved permanently into the third-grade class. He also was assigned a counselor to work on his social relationships and self-esteem.

James' difficulties in writing were addressed by an occupational therapist who worked on his fine motor development. He is now being taught keyboarding skills so that he will be able to use a computer for writing.

In a world of limited resources, competing agendas, and budget cutbacks, why should a principal care about doubly exceptional children? Most are not behavior problems. Most are achieving at or close to grade level.

The answer goes back to your mission to give every child an equal opportunity to realize his or her full potential. More importantly, without recognition and intervention, the doubly exceptional child often is doomed to a daily struggle with frustration, confusion, misunderstanding, and failure. In contrast, with recognition, understanding, and often minimal intervention, the gifted child with a learning disability has the potential to soar academically and develop into a happy and productive individual. □

Gifted Education: A Talent Development Approach

Jonathan A. Plucker

Gifted education programs are among the most controversial aspects of American education. But it is important to distinguish between gifted *education* and gifted *programs*. Gifted education supports schoolwide efforts to provide bright students with an intellectually challenging environment that also enriches the general education program. Gifted programs, which remove students from their regular classrooms during the school day, benefit primarily those who have exceptional academic talents. But identifying those students, and how they can best be served, is highly problematic.

Because of the predominance of traditional, lecture-driven approaches to teaching and learning at most schools, only students suited to that form of instruction have the opportunity to demonstrate talent. Schools that foster individual and diverse talents of students within the classroom are rare.

To avoid the difficulty in identifying and instructing talented students, many experts recommend that schools take a "talent development" approach, applying techniques from gifted education for the benefit of all students.

The following strategies have been successfully used to promote the talent development approach:

Establish a climate for talent development. When I was the enrichment/gifted education spe-

cialist in a large elementary school, my most valuable asset was the support of my principal. For example, when my colleagues grumbled about my work with special education students, the principal sent messages to key faculty about the importance of providing every child with the opportunity to "be gifted." I never heard any grumbling again. Principals should set the tone for their schools by letting everyone know that they value talent development and want everyone to look for talent in non-traditional places.

Don't ignore the needs of highly gifted students. Ignoring the needs of exceptionally talented students is no less objectionable than ignoring the needs of other students. Even if a school is successful in developing the talents of a broad range of students, the social pressures and anti-intellectual climate in many schools can have a negative impact on the social and emotional well-being of highly gifted students. Counselors should be aware of these unique problems and help talented students to deal with them.

Seriously address creativity. The ability to solve problems creatively, both as individuals and in groups, is a valuable skill in the global economy. But when creativity is addressed in our schools, it is usually introduced in the form of abstract or "touchy-feely" techniques that do not require application to real-world problems. Students should use their creativity to solve realistic problems, and to describe their solutions to teachers and other students.

Provide varied means of instruction and assessment. The easiest way to identify talented chil-

dren is to provide opportunities for all children to produce work in areas of interest to them, where they tend to apply high levels of talent. These situations can be created by encouraging the use of varied instructional and assessment strategies; allowing students to test out of material they already know before it is taught; and providing students with choices about products, materials, and topics within the daily curriculum. Distance education can also facilitate talent development by allowing a student to participate in courses that are not offered in his or her own school.

Give teachers flexibility. By providing teachers with flexible schedules, principals can create time for innovative instructional activities. For example, one school finishes its regular curriculum a couple weeks before the end of the school year. During this "found time," students and teachers form interest-based groups that select and attempt to solve real-world problems, such as creating a city in space. □

Resources

- Plucker, J. A. (Ed.). "Education for the Gifted and Talented: Finding Talent in the Quiet Places." *NASSP Bulletin* 82 (special issue) 1998: 1-124.
- Reis, S. M.; Burns, D. E.; and Renzulli, J. S. *Curriculum Compacting: The Complete Guide to Modifying the Regular Curriculum for High Ability Students*. Mansfield Center, Conn.: Creative Learning Press, 1992.
- Renzulli, J. S. *Schools for Talent Development*. Mansfield Center, Conn.: Creative Learning Press, 1994.

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Web Resources

Here are some resources to learn more about twice-exceptional children:

The ERIC Clearinghouse on Disabilities and Gifted Education is accessible at <http://ericec.org/fact/dualexep.html>.

Read suggestions for teaching all gifted students in "Teaching the Gifted

Student," by Kenneth Shore, in the March 2000 issue of *Principal*. Available online at www.naesp.org/comm/p0300a.htm.

Read how one school serves twice-exceptional students in "Mining Maryland's Diamonds: One District's Solution," which appeared in the October 24th, 2001 issue of *Education*

Week. You can find the story in *Education Week's* archives at www.edweek.com.

Find additional research done on gifted children with disabilities by the Center for Talented Youth at www.jhu.edu/gifted/research/biblio.html#Gifted.

Streamlined Seminar (ISSN 0735-0023) is published four times during the school year by the National Association of Elementary School Principals. Rebecca J. Kesner, editor. Candice Johnson, production editor. Single copies: \$2.50; bulk orders (10 or more): \$2.00 ea. Virginia residents add 4.5% sales tax. Specify date and title of issue when ordering. Checks payable to NAESP must accompany order. Send to National Principals' Resource Center, NAESP, 1615 Duke Street, Alexandria, Virginia 22314-3483.

School Leader's Guide to Special Education

by NAESP and Educational Research Service

This guide, part of the *Essentials for Principals* series, provides critical and practical information that focuses on what it takes to maintain a comprehensive and effective system of support for students with special needs. It asks, "What do the laws really say?" and provides clear and concise answers. It provides checklists and sample forms, information on the IEP process and staffing issues, and a list of free Web-based resources.

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Removing the Mask: Giftedness in Poverty

by Paul D. Sloumb and Ruby K. Payne

This book answers two critical questions: How do you identify gifted students from low socioeconomic backgrounds? Once they are identified, what kind of programs are needed to meet their needs? The authors explain why traditional gifted and talented programs, targeted at middle-class students, often fail to recognize the different home environments and experiences of students from poverty. They provide dozens of practical suggestions for "finding and serving the best and brightest from the culture of poverty."

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